

Diverging Paradigms of Citizenship: A Comparative Content Analysis of Elementary Civic Education Textbooks in Indonesia and Thailand

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Abstract

Civic Education at the elementary level plays a strategic role in shaping students' character, civic awareness, and democratic competence, while textbooks as primary learning resources strongly influence how civic values are framed, understood, and practiced. This study is novel in providing one of the first systematic, cross-national comparative analyses of Indonesian and Thai elementary Civic Education textbooks, integrating textbook content analysis with teacher perspectives to reveal divergent civic paradigms in Southeast Asia. Employing a qualitative descriptive design with a comparative content analysis approach, six officially approved textbooks were examined using an analytic matrix encompassing curriculum alignment, language readability, appropriateness of illustrations, and representation of civic values; these findings were triangulated with thematic analysis of responses from 25 Indonesian elementary teachers. The results indicate that Indonesian textbooks demonstrate relatively strong curriculum alignment, employ communicative language and contextual illustrations, and integrate Pancasila-based values through everyday narratives, although conceptual depth remains uneven across grade levels and often requires teacher adaptation. In contrast, Thai textbooks emphasize social harmony, loyalty, and national identity through more formal language and limited visual scaffolding. Overall, the findings reveal contrasting paradigms in textbook design: Indonesia is moving toward student-centered, competency-oriented civic learning, whereas Thailand remains largely normative and state-centered. The implications underscore the need for more consistent conceptual depth, multimodal resources, and structured opportunities for critical engagement so that Civic Education textbooks become more contextual, inclusive, and pedagogically robust in supporting contemporary goals of democratic citizenship education.

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Introduction

Civic Education at the elementary school level plays a fundamental role in shaping students' character, moral values, and civic competencies necessary for participation in a democratic society. At this formative stage, students' moral and social development is strongly influenced by formal educational inputs, particularly textbooks that are used consistently in classroom learning. As one of the most dominant learning resources, textbooks function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as instruments for constructing national identity, civic awareness, and democratic values. In the literature on curriculum studies, textbooks are widely recognized not merely as instructional tools but as ideological texts that frame norms, values, and visions of citizenship endorsed by the state and educational authorities (Apple, 2014). Consequently, the quality and orientation of Civic Education textbooks are critical determinants of how young learners conceptualize democracy, authority, participation, and social responsibility. Therefore, the quality of Civic Education textbooks is a crucial factor in determining the effectiveness of citizenship education.

Globally, citizenship education has undergone a significant paradigm shift from traditional, state-centered, and normative models toward critical, participatory, and student-centered approaches. Traditional models emphasize obedience, national loyalty, and the transmission of fixed civic knowledge, whereas contemporary frameworks foreground critical thinking, deliberation, ethical reasoning, and active civic participation (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This shift is further articulated in critical citizenship education, which positions learners as reflective and agentic citizens capable of questioning power relations and engaging with pluralistic democratic values (Johnson & Morris, 2010). These theoretical perspectives provide an essential lens for textbook analysis, as learning materials often embody implicit assumptions about the "ideal citizen" promoted by national education systems. Within this theoretical context, the distinction between normative citizenship which prioritizes social cohesion and compliance and participatory citizenship, which emphasizes democratic engagement and critical agency, becomes analytically significant (Biesta, 2011). Textbooks serve as a key site where these competing models are operationalized, particularly at the elementary level where students first encounter formal civic concepts. However, despite the growing emphasis on participatory and critical citizenship in global policy discourse, empirical studies show that textbooks frequently lag behind curricular ideals, continuing to reproduce declarative content and state-centric narratives (Pingel, 2010).

Within the Asian context, Indonesia and Thailand represent two relevant cases for comparative analysis due to their distinct historical backgrounds, political systems, and curriculum orientations. In Indonesia, recent curriculum reforms emphasize deep learning and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, which requires textbooks that promote critical thinking, moral reasoning, and collaborative skills. The development of curriculum policies in Indonesia, which are now oriented toward deep learning and strengthening the Pancasila student profile, demands textbooks that facilitate critical thinking, moral reasoning, and collaboration (Utami & Sanjaya, 2025). In contrast, Thailand's Civic Education curriculum places stronger emphasis on social harmony, national identity, and political stability, often integrating historical narratives and traditional values (Pitilyanuwat & Sujiva, 2005; Manjanda & Numun, 2024). These differences make Indonesia and Thailand particularly important contexts for examining how civic values and concepts of citizenship are framed through textbooks



Given the central role of textbooks in classroom practice, this study narrows its focus to Civic Education textbooks as the primary research object. Despite their strategic function in shaping students' civic understanding, textbooks are often taken for granted and rarely subjected to systematic comparative quality analysis. A focused examination of textbook quality is therefore necessary to assess how effectively learning materials align with curriculum demands, students' cognitive development, and contemporary civic competencies.

Previous studies have demonstrated that the quality of Civic Education textbooks significantly influences students' understanding of democracy, human rights, and civic participation. Literature reviews confirm that textbook quality and structure have a significant impact on civics learning. Hoskins and Kerr (2012) demonstrated that students who use textbooks with a strong conceptual structure and informative illustrations demonstrate a better understanding of issues of democracy, human rights, and civic participation (in Saputra & Abdulkarim, 2022). Research highlights several recurring themes, including conceptual coherence, alignment with curriculum outcomes, language readability, and the effectiveness of illustrations in supporting learning. In Indonesia, studies indicate that many elementary school civics textbooks remain overly declarative and insufficiently contextual, particularly in fostering critical reasoning and real-life civic understanding. Similarly, research in Thailand shows a strong emphasis on national identity and social cohesion, while critical civic literacy skills such as reflective thinking and values-based decision-making remain underdeveloped.

Research by Komalasari & Saripudin (2018) found that a number of elementary school civics textbooks do not fully align with the learning outcomes set by the curriculum, particularly in the areas of critical reasoning and contextual understanding. Sujastika & Abdulkarim (2022) added that the material in Civics textbooks is often declarative and fails to connect civic values to the realities of students' lives, thus reducing the relevance of learning. Furthermore, research by Reinita, et al (2020) highlighted the issue of the appropriateness of illustrations, which sometimes do not align with students' sociocultural contexts or fail to facilitate understanding of abstract concepts such as tolerance or justice. In the Thai context, research by Boontinand & Petcharamesree (2018) showed that civics textbooks emphasize national identity, state symbols, and the role of society in maintaining social harmony. However, several studies note that critical civic literacy skills, such as reflective thinking and values-based decision-making, are still under-represented (Buaraphan, 2012). This raises questions about the extent to which Thai textbooks meet the needs of 21st-century civics learning, which demands critical and participatory competencies

Despite the growing body of national-level textbook studies, comparative research between Indonesia and Thailand remains scarce, and existing studies rarely employ a unified analytical framework across countries. The absence of such a framework constitutes a significant limitation for the field, as it hinders systematic cross-national comparison and obscures how different sociopolitical contexts shape textbook quality and citizenship constructions. Moreover, most studies rely solely on document analysis, overlooking teachers' perspectives as key mediators who interpret and adapt textbooks in classroom practice. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing theoretically informed and methodologically robust comparative citizenship education research.

This research is expected to contribute theoretically by enhancing understanding of how concepts of citizenship are constructed and transmitted through textbooks in different



sociopolitical contexts. Practically, the findings can serve as a basis for improving the development and evaluation of Civic Education textbooks, providing evidence-based recommendations for curriculum developers, policymakers, and educators. By identifying strengths and weaknesses in textbook quality, the study supports efforts to design learning materials that are more contextual, inclusive, and aligned with contemporary civic education goals. The main objective of this study is to comparatively analyze the characteristics and quality of Indonesian and Thai elementary school Civic Education textbooks using a systematic content analysis framework. Specifically, the study aims to examine: (1) the alignment of textbook content with national curriculum standards, (2) the readability of language in relation to students' cognitive development, (3) the appropriateness and pedagogical function of illustrations, and (4) the structure of material presentation and representation of civic values in each country's textbooks.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using a comparative content analysis approach to examine the characteristics and quality of elementary school Civic Education textbooks in Indonesia and Thailand. Content analysis was applied to enable systematic and contextual examination of textual and visual materials, while qualitative description supported in-depth interpretation within curricular contexts. The primary data comprised six officially approved textbooks three Indonesian and three Thai textbooks for Grades 4, 5, and 6 selected based on official endorsement, alignment with current national curricula, widespread classroom use, and publication between 2019 and 2023. Grades 4–6 were chosen because they represent the upper elementary level where civic learning transitions from character habituation to abstract concepts such as democracy, rights and obligations, national identity, and social responsibility, supported by students' cognitive readiness and comparable curricular structures in both countries. To contextualize the textbook analysis, qualitative data were collected through open-ended online interviews with 25 Indonesian elementary school teachers selected purposively based on a minimum of five years of teaching experience and representation of urban and rural contexts; these data were used for interpretive support rather than as a primary unit of analysis, with the absence of Thai teacher data acknowledged as a methodological limitation. Data analysis utilized a structured content analysis matrix derived from established textbook evaluation frameworks and citizenship education literature, encompassing four analytical categories: curriculum alignment, language readability, illustrations and visual representation, and structure and representation of civic values, each operationalized through explicit indicators. Analysis proceeded iteratively through familiarization, segmentation of texts and visuals into analytical units, and deductive coding conducted independently by two researchers, with discrepancies resolved through consensus and reference to curriculum documents when necessary. NVivo 12 software supported data management and coding transparency, while teacher interview data were analyzed thematically to enrich interpretation. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of an audit trail documenting analytic decisions.

Results and Discussion

Results

This section reports the findings of the study based exclusively on two data sources: (1) content analysis of elementary-level Civic Education textbooks from Indonesia and Thailand, and (2) interviews with elementary school teachers as textbook users. The presentation focuses solely on empirical findings derived from these sources, without reference to external literature.

The analysis of textbooks identified differences between Indonesian and Thai Civic Education textbooks across four aspects: curriculum alignment, language readability, use of illustrations, and presentation of civic values. Indonesian Pancasila and Civic Education textbooks are organized according to the Merdeka Curriculum. The material is arranged progressively, beginning with basic civic concepts such as rules, personal identity, and simple social interactions in lower grades, and advancing to themes such as diversity, deliberation, and social responsibility in higher grades.

The language used in Indonesian textbooks consists of relatively short sentences, narrative dialogues, and guiding questions. The presentation style is communicative and adjusted to the literacy level of elementary school students. Illustrations in Indonesian textbooks are colorful and depict situations familiar to students' daily lives. Visual elements are placed alongside instructional content. Civic values in Indonesian textbooks are presented through stories and learning activities related to everyday experiences, with emphasis on values associated with Pancasila.

Thai Civic Education (Social Studies) textbooks follow the Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008. The content is primarily presented in a factual and expository format. The language in Thai textbooks is generally formal and uses longer sentences. The presentation relies mainly on written explanations with limited scaffolding. The use of illustrations in Thai textbooks is limited. Visuals mainly consist of national symbols, institutional buildings, and formal representations. Civic values emphasized in Thai textbooks include obedience to rules, loyalty to the nation, social order, and national identity.

The interview data were obtained from 25 elementary school teachers across 15 provinces in Indonesia, including Banten, Jambi, West Nusa Tenggara, East Java, Central Java, Riau, South Sumatra, West Java, North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Central Kalimantan, Bengkulu, South Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara, and Bali. Teachers described their experiences using Pancasila and Civic Education textbooks in classroom practice. Teachers reported that the textbooks provide a clear structure and follow the curriculum sequence, which assists in organizing lessons. However, teachers indicated that explanations in the textbooks are often insufficient. Several teachers reported the need to simplify language and provide additional explanations during instruction. Teachers also noted that visual support in the textbooks is limited for explaining abstract civic concepts. As a result, teachers reported adding supplementary materials. Across interviews, teachers consistently described modifying textbook materials by rephrasing content, adding examples related to students' daily lives, and using additional media such as images, videos, and worksheets.

The content analysis reveals clear cross-national differences across four analytical dimensions: curriculum alignment, language readability, use of illustrations, and the integration of civic values (see Table 1). Indonesian textbooks demonstrate strong alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly with learning outcomes related to character education, civic reasoning, and the Pancasila Student Profile. The structure of the material reflects a progression from basic civic concepts (e.g., rules, self-identity, and simple social interactions) in lower

grades toward more complex civic themes (e.g., diversity, deliberation, and social responsibility) in upper grades. Language use is generally communicative and age-appropriate, characterized by short sentences, narrative dialogues, and guiding questions. Illustrations are colorful, contextual, and closely related to students' everyday experiences. Civic values especially Pancasila values are embedded through daily-life narratives and learning activities.

In contrast, Thai Civic Education (Social Studies) textbooks align with the 2008 Basic Education Core Curriculum but present content in a predominantly factual and expository manner. Language tends to be formal and information-dense, with longer sentences and limited scaffolding for younger learners. Visual support is minimal and largely symbolic, consisting mainly of state symbols, institutional photographs, and formal imagery. Civic values emphasized include loyalty, obedience to rules, social harmony, and national identity, with limited opportunities for dialogical or inquiry-based engagement. Table 1 summarizes the results of the comparative content analysis and illustrates these distinctions across the four analytical dimensions.

Table 1. Results of Content Analysis of Indonesian Civics and Thai Social Studies Textbooks

Aspect	<i>Pancasila and Civic Education Textbook of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum</i>	<i>Civics (Social Studies) Textbook of Thailand Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008</i>
<i>Suitability of Material with Curriculum</i>	In line with Learning Outcome phase A; focus introduction mark basics and rules simple; material nature contextual.	In line with 2008 curriculum; materials factual-informative, following pattern top-down instructional.
<i>Language Readability</i>	Communicative language, sentences short, narrative dialogue, very appropriate development literacy beginning	Sentence long and formal; dominant expository; readability medium-to-low for student class low.
<i>Eligibility Illustration</i>	Illustration colored, close with experience students, nature instructional.	Minimal illustrations; more Lots formal symbols; function instructional weak.
<i>Civic Values</i>	Emphasize habituation Pancasila values through story life daily.	Emphasize compliance, loyalty national, social norms, and state identity; a little critical dialogue space.

The findings demonstrate that Indonesian and Thai elementary school civic textbooks embody distinct paradigms of citizenship education, reflecting broader curriculum orientations and sociopolitical contexts. While both countries position civic education as foundational for shaping young citizens, the manner in which citizenship is constructed, represented, and pedagogically mediated differs substantially.

Indonesian textbooks exhibit a gradual shift toward a student-centered and competency-oriented paradigm. The alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile indicates an attempt to move beyond declarative civic knowledge toward the cultivation of critical reasoning, moral reflection, and participatory dispositions. The use of contextual narratives, dialogical language, and everyday-life illustrations positions students as active moral



subjects who learn citizenship through reflection and habituation rather than memorization. This approach resonates with global trends in citizenship education that emphasize participatory and critical citizenship. By contrast, Thai textbooks remain largely embedded in a state-centered and normative paradigm. The dominance of formal language, expository explanations, and symbolic illustrations reflects an orientation toward transmitting civic knowledge as fixed norms rather than as lived and contestable practices. Citizenship is framed primarily as loyalty to the nation, compliance with rules, and respect for institutions, particularly the monarchy. While this approach may contribute to social stability and cohesion, it offers limited pedagogical space for deliberation, critical dialogue, or civic agency.

These contrasting textbook paradigms matter because they shape different types of future citizens. Indonesian textbooks, despite their limitations, tend to encourage the formation of citizens who are expected to reason, discuss, and apply civic values in everyday contexts. Thai textbooks, on the other hand, are more likely to foster compliant and institutionally oriented citizens, whose civic role is defined by adherence rather than participation. From a pedagogical standpoint, the Indonesian model aligns more closely with contemporary theories of critical and participatory citizenship education, while the Thai model reflects a traditional moral-civic approach. These orientations are not merely instructional choices but are deeply connected to national political cultures and educational traditions. Indonesia's post-reform democratic context creates space for participatory citizenship learning, whereas Thailand's history of political fluctuation and centralized authority reinforces a stabilizing, top-down civic narrative.

Teacher data substantiate and deepen the content analysis findings. Teachers' frequent need to simplify language, add visuals, and design supplementary activities confirms that textbook alignment with curriculum standards does not automatically translate into pedagogical effectiveness. The discussion of Figure 3, which illustrates narrative-heavy and expository textbook pages, is best understood in this context: teachers' complaints about overly textual content directly reflect the lack of multimodal and inquiry-based design identified in the content analysis. Teachers' compensatory practices such as creating worksheets, using personal digital devices, or simulating civic activities highlight the practical consequences of textbook limitations. While these adaptations demonstrate teacher agency, they also reveal systemic inequities, particularly in schools with limited digital infrastructure. Thus, textbook quality is not a neutral technical issue but a key factor influencing equity and learning opportunity.

Importantly, the findings also reveal weaknesses in both contexts. Indonesian textbooks show uneven conceptual depth across grade levels, with lower grades sometimes oversimplifying civic concepts and higher grades demanding cognitive skills that require strong teacher mediation. Thai textbooks, meanwhile, lack participatory and multimodal approaches that could make civic learning more meaningful and accessible to children. Overall, the results indicate that Indonesian civic textbooks are in transition toward a student-centered paradigm, while Thai textbooks remain anchored in a state-centered model. This comparison underscores that textbook reform must be aligned not only with curriculum standards but also with broader pedagogical goals and civic competencies. Textbooks should function as learning ecosystems integrating content, visuals, activities, and reflection to support the development of critical, reflective, and participatory young citizens.



Discussion

An analysis of the characteristics of Indonesian elementary school civics textbooks and Thai elementary school civics textbooks reveals distinct dynamics in how the two countries construct civics education at the elementary school level. Although both position civics as the foundation for developing young democratic citizens, the representation of content, presentation structure, and emphasis on values show significant differences influenced by their respective national curriculum frameworks. The findings of the content analysis, which encompassed aspects of material suitability to the curriculum, language readability, appropriateness of illustrations, and integration of civic values, provide a comprehensive picture that textbooks function not only as sources of knowledge but also as ideological and pedagogical tools that determine the quality of value internalization in students.

In terms of content alignment with the curriculum, the two Indonesian textbooks analyzed, for both lower and upper grades, demonstrated a high level of alignment with the Learning Outcomes of the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes the development of competencies that include critical reasoning, social awareness, and the gradual instilling of Pancasila values. In the lower grade textbooks, the material presentation structure emphasizes the introduction of basic concepts such as rules, self-identity, and simple social interactions. This aligns with the principles of early childhood cognitive development, which require concrete stimuli and direct experience. Meanwhile, the upper grade textbooks facilitate more mature cognitive development by presenting social case studies, project-based activities, and narratives that require analytical skills. This approach aligns with the principle of the spiral curriculum, which ensures the progressive accumulation of knowledge. In contrast, the Civics textbook in Thailand still displays more informative and normative characteristics. The presentation of the material is dominated by structured explanations of government institutions, general societal rules, and national identity. The material is presented in a linear manner and focuses on the cognitive-informative aspect, rather than on developing broader civic competencies such as civic reasoning, dialogue, or deliberative participation. This indicates that the Thai curriculum emphasizes social stability and loyalty to institutions, in line with research findings on Thai citizenship education, which places obedience as a core value in the formation of young citizens.

Indonesian textbooks, in terms of the appropriateness of the material presented, align with Learning Outcomes (CP) phases A to C, focusing on the development of critical reasoning competencies, reflective skills, and an understanding of Pancasila values as a lifelong learner profile (Ravyansah & Abdillah, 2021). This aligns with the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum, which prioritizes flexibility and conceptual depth (Salsabila & Febriyana, 2024). Books for lower grades emphasize the introduction of basic values such as rules, discipline, and self-identity, while books for higher grades develop students' analytical skills through case studies and project-based activities. According to Brunner (1977), it demonstrates that publishers have aligned the sequence of concepts with children's cognitive development, as recommended by Piaget's developmental theory and the spiral curriculum approach (Brunner, 1977 in Torney Purta et al, 2001).

The Thai elementary school Civics (Social Studies) textbook, based on the Ministry of Education's 2008 Basic Education Core Curriculum, still displays a more factual and normative presentation pattern. The material is structured as a series of information about citizenship,

political institutions, and social norms, with little room for reflective or dialogical activities. Although the content aligns with the core competencies of the Thai curriculum, its orientation is more cognitive-informational than competency-based, as in Indonesia. This finding is consistent with the findings of Boontinand & Petcharamesree (2018), who explained that Thai civics education still tends to be top-down and focuses on fostering social compliance and national identity through memorization and direct instruction. Figure 1 as follow shows a sample of the contents page of a book containing the content of an Indonesian textbook.



Figure 1 Visualization in Indonesian Text Book for 2 Grade Student in Elementary School
Captured from Pancasila Education Digital Book for Elementary School Grade 2 by Aziz et al, p. 92 . Copyright 2022 by BPIP dan Kemdikbud RI.

Another striking difference is seen in the readability of the language. From a readability perspective, Indonesian textbooks were found to use a more conversational style, with short sentences, provocative questions, and dialogue between characters. The readability level is age-appropriate, with vocabulary adapted to the functional literacy level of elementary school children. This presentation model supports the development of early literacy and more contextual civic literacy (Sukmayadi, et al, 2024; Sujastika & Abdulkarim, 2022). Thai textbooks tend to use longer, formal, and informative sentences without much elaboration of contextual examples. This potentially makes it difficult for lower-grade students to understand abstract concepts such as social rules or government structures. This finding corroborates a study by (Lawthong, 2011). which highlighted the low readability of Thai Social Studies textbooks due to an overly expository style.

In terms of the appropriateness of illustrations, Indonesian textbooks utilize illustrations in an integrative and instructional manner. Visualizations in the form of everyday situations and simple infographics help connect abstract concepts to students' concrete experiences. In higher-grade textbooks, illustrations are utilized not only for attractive design but also to reinforce arguments, for example through graphics on diversity or social maps. Thai Civics textbooks primarily depict formal symbols of the state or institutional structures. In Indonesian textbooks, illustrations serve not only decorative purposes but also serve instructional purposes, such as showing examples of good behavior, flowcharts, or simple infographics. This approach



is consistent with the principle of dual coding, which strengthens conceptual understanding through visual representation (Paivio, 1991 in Lestari & Ramadan, 2024). Meanwhile, Thai textbooks feature minimal illustrations and primarily focus on formal photographs of state symbols, government structures, or sacred images. While aesthetically pleasing, these illustrations do not support students' conceptual understanding and do not adequately depict everyday situations close to children's experiences. This aligns with research by Komalasari & Saripudin (2018), which shows that Thai Social Studies textbooks still do not optimally utilize visual pedagogical approaches.

The most distinguishing aspect of the two types of textbooks is the integration of civic values. Indonesian textbooks integrate Pancasila values holistically and contextually, for example through narratives about family life, interactions at school, or community situations close to students' realities. This approach positions students as ethical subjects who learn to navigate social issues through reflection, dialogue, and habituation. High-grade textbooks explicitly provide space for discussions about tolerance, social justice, deliberation, and mutual cooperation as democratic values that must be practiced, not simply memorized. Civics Thailand emphasizes values such as loyalty, obedience to rules, and respect for state institutions, including the monarchy. These values are conveyed in a narrative structure that is more prescriptive and less likely to foster critical thinking. This orientation directs civics learning toward the formation of a stable political identity, but does not support students' ability to understand social dynamics reflectively and critically. Pedagogically, this approach has the potential to create obedient but less participatory citizens. Figure 2. below are the example of a page in thai textbook.

Regarding the integration of civic values, Indonesian textbooks holistically integrate Pancasila values into stories, learning activities, and case studies of everyday life. The values of mutual cooperation, tolerance, deliberation, and social responsibility are embedded through contextual narratives, encouraging reflective and practical learning. This model aligns with the direction of Pancasila-based character education, which emphasizes habituation and internalization through experiential learning (Ravyansah, & Abdillah, 2021). On the other hand, the Civics Thai textbook emphasizes loyalty, adherence to norms, and a strong national identity, particularly toward state institutions and the monarchy. The narratives of values provide little space for critical dialogue, thus tending to foster a homogenous and bureaucratic civic identity, rather than critical citizenship. These findings align with Boontinand & Petcharamesree (2018) study, which found that Thai civic education still emphasizes the moral paradigm of civic obedience. A more comprehensive comparison reveals that Indonesian textbooks appear to be geared toward the development of critical, democratic, and participatory citizens, in line with international trends in modern citizenship education that emphasize critical thinking, civic reasoning, and deliberative engagement (Banks, 2008; Komalasari, K., & Saripudin, 2018). Meanwhile, Thai textbooks adhere more closely to the traditional paradigm, where citizenship is understood as adherence to rules, love of country, and social stability (Jerlinger & Watcharaparn, 2020). This difference may be influenced by the political and social contexts of each country: Indonesia is situated within a democratic ecosystem that encourages public participation, while Thailand has a long history of sometimes fluctuating political stability, so citizenship education tends to be geared toward strengthening institutional legitimacy.



Figure 2 Example of Thai cover textbooks of Civics (Social Studies) for 1 Grade Student of Elementary School Based on *Thailand Basic Education Core Curriculum 2008*

However, this does not mean that Indonesian textbooks are without weaknesses. One important finding is the uneven depth of material between textbooks for lower and upper grades. Lower grade textbooks tend to be very simple, leaving some civic concepts underdeveloped. Conversely, higher grade textbooks present fairly complex material, requiring teachers' pedagogical competence in bridging the gap in students' thinking levels. Meanwhile, the Thai textbook's weakness lies in the lack of a participatory and multimodal approach that can bring Civics learning to life, making it more meaningful and relevant. Thus, both countries have room for improvement: Indonesia in terms of consistent conceptual depth across phases, and Thailand in terms of pedagogical innovation and transformation of the delivery approach.

Overall, this content analysis indicates that the Indonesian Civics textbook has shifted toward a student-centered civic learning paradigm, while Thailand still maintains a state-centered civic education paradigm. These differences in approach should be understood as a reflection of national curriculum policies, educational traditions, and political dynamics that influence the orientation of young citizens' development. The implications of this research strengthen the argument that textbook development cannot be separated from the pedagogical approach and civic literacy competencies being developed. Moving forward, textbook reform needs to consider the integration of critical values, local context, and representation of children's experiences as subjects of citizenship.

Teachers' Empirical Perspectives on Elementary School Civics Textbooks. The research findings indicate that elementary school Civics textbooks in Indonesia are in an ambiguous position: structurally aligned with the curriculum, but substantively inadequate to support deep learning practices. Structural alignment is evident in several ways: textbooks follow official learning phases, introduce civic concepts progressively, and embed Pancasila values across chapters. However, substantive inadequacy becomes apparent when examining the nature of learning activities and representations. Many tasks remain descriptive rather than analytical, narrative rather than problem-oriented, and morally prescriptive rather than dialogical.



This creates a paradox. Textbooks symbolically endorse student-centered and competency-based learning, yet their internal design often requires teachers to revert to traditional instructional strategies. The curriculum promises autonomy, inquiry, and contextualization, but the textbook provides limited scaffolding for these practices. Consequently, the burden of transforming curriculum ideals into lived pedagogy shifts disproportionately onto teachers.

On the strengths, teachers acknowledged that the textbooks provide a basic framework of material, a sequence of competencies, and core concepts that align with learning elements and outcomes. This aligns with Sujastika & Abdulkarim (2022) analysis, which asserts that civics textbooks are generally designed to follow the curriculum's direction, thus serving as the primary resource for ensuring the achievement of content standards. Furthermore, some textbooks have added digital features such as video barcodes, reflection sheets, or cultural information as an effort to modernize learning resources (Saputra & Abdulkarim, 2022). However, these innovations are not evenly distributed, are not easily accessible, and do not fully support the principle of inclusivity in schools with limited facilities.

The findings position Indonesian elementary school Civics (Pancasila and Civic Education) textbooks in an ambiguous pedagogical space. On the one hand, they are *structurally aligned* with the Merdeka Curriculum: learning outcomes, competency phases, and the Pancasila Student Profile are clearly reflected in the sequencing of topics, stated objectives, and formal organization of content. On the other hand, they are *substantively inadequate* in supporting the kind of deep, inquiry-based, and reflective learning practices that the curriculum normatively demands.

This ambiguity suggests that alignment operates primarily at the surface-structural level curriculum terminology, competency labels, and thematic organization rather than at the pedagogical-substantive level, where learning is expected to cultivate civic reasoning, participatory dispositions, and moral reflection. As a result, textbooks appear compliant with reform discourses while simultaneously reproducing older instructional logics that privilege exposition, narration, and factual transmission.

In practical terms, Indonesian textbooks function as *curriculum-aligned documents* but not yet as *curriculum-enacting tools*. They articulate what students should learn but insufficiently demonstrate *how* learning should unfold in classrooms.

On the other hand, the shortcomings of textbooks are more prominent in teachers' perceptions. Teachers found that much of the material used language that was too technical and not communicative for elementary school students, requiring them to simplify the language and add contextual examples. This finding reinforces Utami & Sanjaya (2018) argument that elementary school teachers in Indonesia often adapt instruction because textbooks are unable to accommodate the heterogeneity of student abilities. Teachers' difficulties in teaching abstract topics such as the formulation of Pancasila and Bhinneka Tunggal Ika demonstrate the importance of visual and multimodal representation, as recommended by Usmi & Murdiono (2021). The lack of cultural illustrations, infographics, diagrams, and concept maps makes it difficult for students to grasp abstract concepts that require visual mediation. Yuliana (2022) also showed that students' diversity literacy improved significantly when textbooks included comprehensive and relevant cultural representations.

Overall, teacher perceptions indicate that the quality of Civics textbooks still faces a gap between structural alignment with the curriculum and the need for authentic, in-depth learning. Teachers need books that are more communicative, contextual, visual, multimodal, and activity-rich. According to teachers, the ideal textbook is not simply a source of information, but a learning ecosystem that facilitates the development of critical, reflective, and competent young citizens. Therefore, improving textbook quality must be carried out through an integrative approach encompassing material substance, visual design, a variety of activities, and inclusive technological support for all schools. This way, textbooks can function optimally as effective pedagogical tools, as mandated by the *Merdeka Curriculum* in the Era of In-Depth Learning.

The ambiguous position of Indonesian Civics textbooks structurally aligned yet substantively inadequate reveals a critical tension in contemporary curriculum reform. Alignment at the policy level does not automatically translate into pedagogical transformation. Instead, it redistributes responsibility downward, positioning teachers as the primary agents who must bridge the gap between curriculum ideals and classroom realities. For teacher training, this means that preparing teachers to *teach with textbooks* is no longer sufficient. Teachers must be trained to *teach beyond textbooks* to critique them, adapt them, and supplement them in ways that realize the deeper aims of civic education. Ultimately, without a parallel investment in robust, reflective, and design-oriented teacher training, the promise of structurally aligned curricula risks remaining pedagogically unfulfilled.

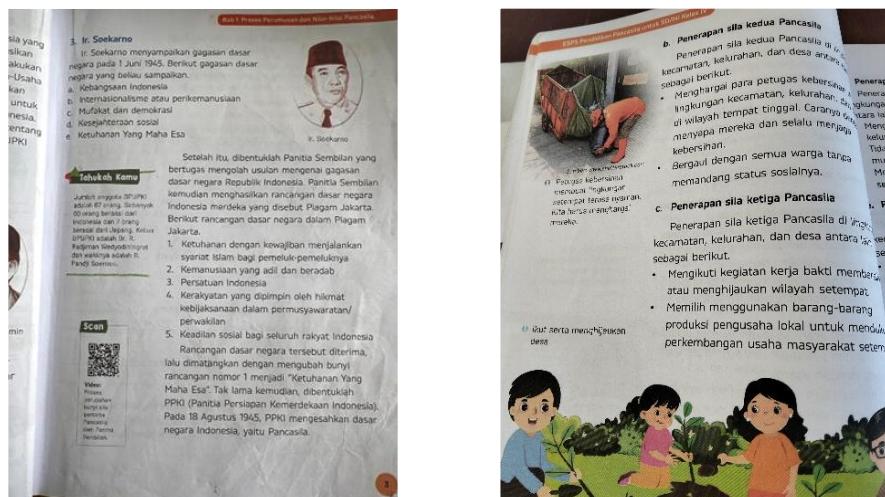


Figure 3 Example of Indonesian textbooks of Pancasila and Civic Education

Captured from *Pancasila Education textbook* for Elementary School Grade 4 by p. 43. Copyright 2022

The following Figure 3 is an illustration of a sample book contents page. The sample page image in Figure 3. above shows the reason why that some teachers in the regions across Indonesia still complain about the textbook's overly narrative expository content. Teachers also assess that textbooks are still oriented towards factual cognition and do not encourage critical thinking, collaboration, or inquiry activities. The lack of case studies, community projects, and problem-based learning activities reinforces the findings of Srichana & Buaraphan (2025) that Civics textbooks still function as "information transmitters" rather than as vehicles for developing reflective civic literacy. In fact, the *Merdeka Curriculum* requires learning activities



that involve real-life experiences, moral reflection, and social simulations. This gap causes teachers to independently design additional worksheets (*LKPD*), add analytical exercises, and modify materials to suit student competencies. Practically, in Indonesian schools, teachers assess that limited facilities such as digital infrastructure, LCDs, or internet connections are structural obstacles that hinder the use of digital resources in textbooks. Inquiry-based civics learning is difficult to achieve when schools rely heavily on low-quality textbooks and minimal technological support. Teachers ultimately resort to compensatory strategies such as playing videos from personal devices, utilizing simple simulations, or creating manual visual media.

Compared to international standards, Indonesian civics textbooks also lag behind in integrating digital citizenship and global citizenship skills. Curricula in Finland and Australia, for example, have emphasized citizenship for the digital age, multiculturalism, and community engagement as core learning areas (Schulz et al, 2023; OECD, 2016). Meanwhile, Indonesian civics textbooks still tend to place citizenship within the philosophically important normative framework of Pancasila, but have not yet been enriched with a contemporary global context. This led teachers to assess that textbooks need to be expanded to include digital citizenship practices, global issues, and participatory learning.

Conclusion

This study reveals systematic differences between Indonesian and Thai elementary school Civic Education textbooks in their content orientation, pedagogical organization, and construction of citizenship values, reflecting broader divergences in curriculum philosophy and sociopolitical contexts. Indonesian textbooks tend to emphasize a contextual, learner-oriented approach that integrates Pancasila values through everyday narratives and developmental learning sequences, whereas Thai textbooks predominantly reflect a state-centered model of citizenship characterized by formal language, structured exposition, and strong emphasis on national identity, social harmony, and institutional loyalty. Methodologically, this study contributes an integrative comparative framework that enables cross-national analysis of civic textbook quality by examining the operationalization of curriculum ideology through language, visuals, material structure, and value representation, thereby advancing theoretical understanding of how citizenship is constructed in elementary education and underscoring the role of textbooks as both pedagogical and ideological instruments. Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its focus on upper-grade textbooks, the absence of Thai teacher perspectives, and the relatively small corpus of analyzed materials, which may constrain the generalizability and classroom-level interpretation of the findings. Future research is therefore encouraged to incorporate classroom observations, teacher guides, student perspectives, and longitudinal designs, as well as broader textbook samples across grade levels and editions, to more comprehensively examine how differing textbook paradigms shape civic learning experiences and the development of students' civic reasoning over time.

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Authors' Note

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